

RECKLESS RALPH'S DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

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A CURIOSITY OF HORROR !

By G.H.Cordier.

From time to time there have appeared on this earth among the members of the human race, abnormalities, monsters, being accursed, regarded with terror and loathing, and around whose fearful personalities, invariably gathered an atmosphere of mystery and horror.

Men of science, especially the members of the medical profession, know that such creatures have existed, but the great mass of humanity has remained in ignorance, little dreaming that by any possibility such deviations from the usual course of nature could have ever occurred.

Glancing through the pages of the writers of classic antiquity, we find hints of the presence of such monsters at the celebration of the dark mysteries of the pagan religions.

In "The Island of Dr. Moreau", the powerful but gruesome story of H.G.Wells, we read of unnatural beings artificially produced by the effects of science; while the same horrible subject is the theme of the tragedies and gloomy pages of Victor Hugo's two stupendous masterpieces, "Notre Dame" and "L'Homme Qui Ri."

When such a being entered into this world, its birth was generally kept profoundly

secret. Few knew of its existence, and these few kept the knowledge to themselves. If the thing lived, a building, public or private, according to circumstances, situated in a secluded neighborhood received and kept the monster a prisoner, never more to be viewed by the sight of man.

The writer personally knew one in his childhood and another, later in life; being two such cases of malformation, both of a minor nature, and heard of another of a much more horrible complication; and for that reason, even if he had no other, is perfectly convinced of the truth of the story he is about to narrate.

Fifty years ago, there was attached to a remote ward of the great London Hospital, a small house of two rooms. In this little dwelling, afar from and removed from all intercourse with humanity; was kept confined and carefully guarded, like the famous prisoner of the Bastille, the Iron Mask; but doomed to an infinitely more fearful fate—the horrible creature known as the Elephant Man. Of all known cases of inhuman monsters, this is one of the most fearful and horrible. The little that has been revealed of this bewitched being, is of such an extraordinary nature, and in all its details such an awful story, that for the sake of common humanity it is as well that much has been left untold.

The story is one of the most dreadful that has ever been told, or that by any power of the imagination, could possibly be conceived. It is the story of a human being afflicted with an awful curse; of a man hideously deformed so that all who looked upon him, fled in terror. It is the story of one, from whom all shrank in utter loathing; of a being set apart by some mysterious decree of Nature, from all communion with his kind.

Strong men groaned and grew sick at heart; women fainted if by any chance they looked upon him.

It was in the year 1886 that Dr. Frederick Treves of the London Hospital was one cold night passing through one of the narrow and gloomy streets of that portion of London of evil fame, known as Whitechapel. It was in the same neighborhood that Jack the Ripper pursued his career of horrible crime some time afterward. As he was making his way along the dimly lighted street, the doctor was struck by the appearance of a small crowd of people gathered in front of the miserable dens that served as shops in that unsavory neighborhood. The members of the crowd were talking in low tones, and glancing fearfully toward the open doorway that served as an entrance to the place, in front of which they were assembled.

The doctor halted and inquired the cause of the gathering. A few words gave the required information and, amazed by what he had heard, the doctor approached the entrance and passed into the place. The room had been used for the exhibition of one of the penny shows common to the London slums; chairs and benches were in rows across the floor, and at one end was a curtain, from behind which came a glimmer of faint light. The doctor advanced to the curtain. Extending his hand, he drew one end of it aside and looked into the space beyond. The light came from a single gas-jet low down in the wall. Over this was suspended a brick which was heated by the gas and formed a miserable substitute for a stove to warm the icy air of the place. A dark form, half revealed by the dim light, crouched in front of the gas-jet, as though endeavoring to obtain warmth from the flickering flame.

At the sound of the doctor's footsteps, the form straightened up, turned, and confronted him.

The doctor was a brave man, inured to many ghastly sights and accustomed to scenes of a fearful nature, but as he viewed the figure before him, even the iron-nerved physician felt a thrill of horror, and shrank back appalled. Recovering himself instantly, he stopped forward and spoke kindly to the horrible being upon which he gazed. The effect was curious. The wretched creature, accustomed only to harsh words and blows all his miserable life, could hardly realize that this distinguished gentleman was really talking to him in the kindest tones and in the most gentle manner. He bent low before the kind-hearted physician and fairly sobbed his gratitude for the kindly consideration with which he was being treated.

In husky unnatural tones, which the doctor could only with great difficulty understand, he told the story of his life, and as he did so, the doctor listened attentively, while at the same time examining carefully the horrible creature whose awful deformity put him outside the pale of humanity. Amazing and incredible to relate, what the doctor saw, was nothing less than what appeared to be an elephant head on a distorted misshapen human body. The head was of enormous size in proportion to the body and was almost completely denuded of hair, while the skin was rough like the skin of an elephant and of a leaden hue.

The eyes were deep-set and sunken; the cartilage of the nose had grown to an abnormal length and hung down over the mouth, exactly like the proboscis of the above-mentioned beast. Both arms and hands were

were also deformed; the right hand more so than the left, the unnatural rough skin having joined the fingers together until the hands had all the appearance of an elephants foot.

The story this miserable being had to tell was a sad one, indeed. He had been but slightly marked by his deformity at birth, and at first nothing appeared that would tend to separate him from humankind. As he grew in years however, and became a youth, his affliction grew with great rapidity, and his physical condition became such that at last he became an object of common aversion.

His parents had been respectable working people, and at its outset, his life seemed to the career of a respectable working man, but with the progress of his disease, no one could bear to look at him, and at last he found it impossible to obtain work.

At this juncture he fell into the hands of the proprietor of one of those penny shows that abound in the lower quarters of English towns and cities, and for years this unfortunate being earned a miserable living by being exhibited on a platform before audiences composed of the lowest and most degraded of the inhabitants of the various places into which he was conveyed.

Degraded and brutal as were the people before whom he was exhibited, even they were appalled when the showman drew the curtain and revealed the hideous, monstrous form. Women screamed and fainted, and men cursed and yelled as revelation was made of the awful shape. Generally the exhibition ended by the whole audience rushing with exclamations of horror, from the cellar or other place where the exhibition had been held.

At the conclusion of his story, the doctor spoke kindly to him and bade him to hope for

better things. True to his promise, he short-after had him removed to the London Hospital where his arrival caused the utmost consternation. None of the attendants would have anything to do with him, and to avoid having him with the other patients, he was lodged for a time in the hospital attic.

Dr. Treves, happening to mention the case to notable actress of the time, Mrs. Kendall, that lady, with the characteristic charity of the theatrical profession, at once advanced the funds necessary to care for the unfortunate creature, until other arrangements could be made.

A few days later there appeared in the "Times", a letter stating in concise terms the fact of the existence of the case, and as the victim was an object too horrible for mankind to contemplate, it was necessary to place him in seclusion; and pleaded for funds to give him proper care. This letter was all the information ever given to the public concerning the matter, but such was the interest aroused, that in the course of a week's time, a sum was raised that was ample to build the man a home and keep him for the rest of his life.

As stated before, a building of two rooms was built close by the hospital, and in perfect seclusion, apart from the institution and apart from mankind, the wretched being spent the remainder of his days.

The amazing nature of the case excited great interest among those who were privileged to have knowledge of the matter, which included the highest in the land, and all possible was done to make the life of the strange creature-half-man and half-beast-as pleasant as possible under the circumstances.

The immensely popular Prince of Wales of the time, afterward Edward VII, together with the Princess, and others of the Royal Family, paid the animal-man a visit, spoke to him and treated him with the greatest kindness, and ever afterward took an interest in his welfare.

One sad aspect of this wonderful and amazing case, which stands unique in grotesque horror, was that the victim of such a fearful doom, was a being of a loving, dreamy, and romantic nature, possessed of considerable intelligence. He had the soul of a kindly affectionate man in the body of a brute beast. He gained some education and after he was taken care of by those interested in him and placed in his home, he spent the most of his time in reading, and soon gained considerable knowledge.

His end is somewhat shrouded in mystery. From the little that was allowed to issue forth regarding his demise, we can gather but meager details. It is known, however, that he expired during the night, the cause of his end being the overgrowth of bone-one of the phases of his disease-which caused his head to become so enormous behind, as to drag it back on his shoulders, contracting the windpipe and causing death.

The writer has written the foregoing article based on a newspaper narrative of many years ago-to prove that many of the horror stories to be found in the current story magazines, and also in those of times past, were not altogether fiction.

As before stated, the writer personally know of a case of a similar nature, in his childhood days, tho not of such an appalling nature, and also heard of other such cases later. As it is, this case stands unique, and the writer entitles it "Curiosity of Horror"

BOB'S CHATTER.

In going over my index file of names and addresses, just tossed away that of Cantorman Brothers, Pittsburgh. Don't ask me why; my lip is cracked....Some of the "wise guys" will never take to heart, my admonition to stack in a complete set of both "Beadle's Frontier and Deadwood Dicks." Perhaps they think that there's a nigger in the woodpile, but it may be on them for their failure to Stop, Look & Listen. Westbrook can't keep on forever.

Why don't more collectors send in some interesting dope? Two or three performers can't keep the whole show going. They are human and get tired once in a "while"...No, I'm not "regusted" about dime novels. As a famous Navy man once said: "I've just begun to fight; and on top of that-"don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes". Now, who said that? Don't all speak at "vunce"....Boys, the cold days are coming. Won't it be fun to sit by the fire and enjoy one of our favorites? "Turn Back the Universe and Give Me Yesterday" ! An old nursery rhyme : "needles and pins-needles and pins" (my next line is: "When a chap dime-novels collects, his trouble begins" Well, so long...Bob Smeltzer in person.

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Rudyard Kipling, famed British author, dies at age of 70 in London (Jan. 17th) after a gallant fight with a perforated gastric ulcer. He was born in Bombay, Dec. 30, 1865, son of John Lockwood Kipling, artist and museum curator. When 21, we published "Departmental Ditties" (light verse) and in the next three years, published a series of tales, beginning with "Plain Tales from the Hills". He also brought out many other books and articles.

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